

Animal abuse bill leaves much to be desired

Anthony Kuipers/Moscow-Pullman Daily News

We scratch our heads over why Idaho continues to take baby steps - rather than large leaps - to protect animals from torture and abuse.

In 2012, lawmakers finally made it a felony to mistreat pets and livestock. At the time Idaho and the Dakotas were the only states that hadn't passed such a law.

In August, the much publicized and controversial ag-gag law outlawing undercover investigations of farming operations was finally struck down in federal district court.

Now it's 2016, and this legislative session reminds us our lawmakers are still much too hesitant to punish those who abuse animals.

The Idaho House Agricultural Affairs Committee introduced a bill last week that redefines what qualifies as animal cruelty and torture in the state, according to a Friday Associated Press story.

The legislation would define torture as acts that intentionally and maliciously cause an animal to suffer or feel prolonged pain.

OK, this seems like a good start, but a second look at that definition reveals a couple of very large holes.

Here's where the head scratching begins: The new definition of torture does not include accidents or neglected animals. Additionally, the definition of animal cruelty would no longer apply to animals killed or wounded by being overworked.

Rep. Ken Andrus, R-Blackfoot, the committee's chairman, said he worked with both the agriculture industry and animal advocates before bringing this legislation forward.

It's hard to figure out why animal advocates would sign off on a bill that deems it acceptable for owners to neglect their animals without repercussions. If people do not take care of the animal they're responsible for, that sounds intentional - if not downright malicious - to us. They should be held accountable.

And what's more cruel than overworking an animal to the point of injury or death, whether it's intentional or not?

This bill is another example of Idaho taking too long and not going far enough when it comes to protecting our animals. We'd like to see the state get tougher on this issue.